CRITICS CHOICE MAGAZINE
FOCUS ON

SUPERMAN

A 6 PART MINI-SERIES BY BYRNE & GIORDANO
THE COMICS EVENT OF THE CENTURY!
THE MAN OF STEEL
NO.1
Batman fights Swamp Thing in SWAMP THING #531

MAN OF STEEL

BY JAMES VAN HISE

SUPERMAN

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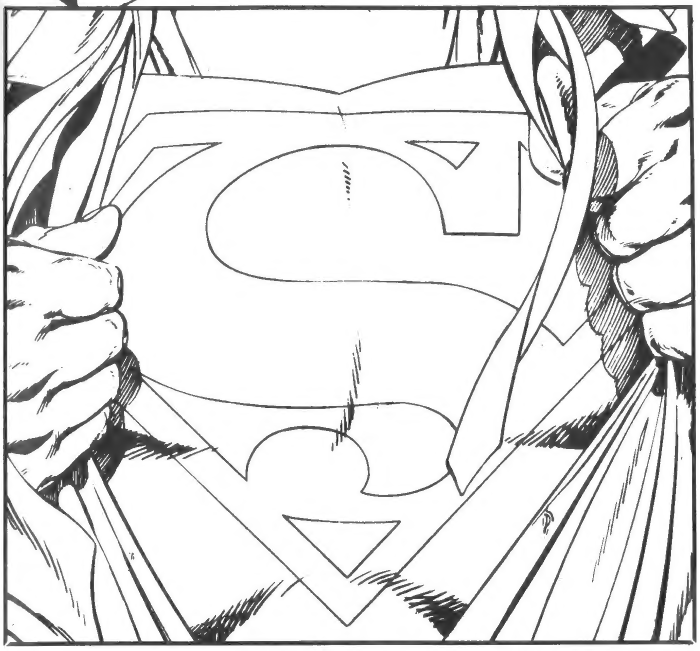

BY JAMES VAN HISE

EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

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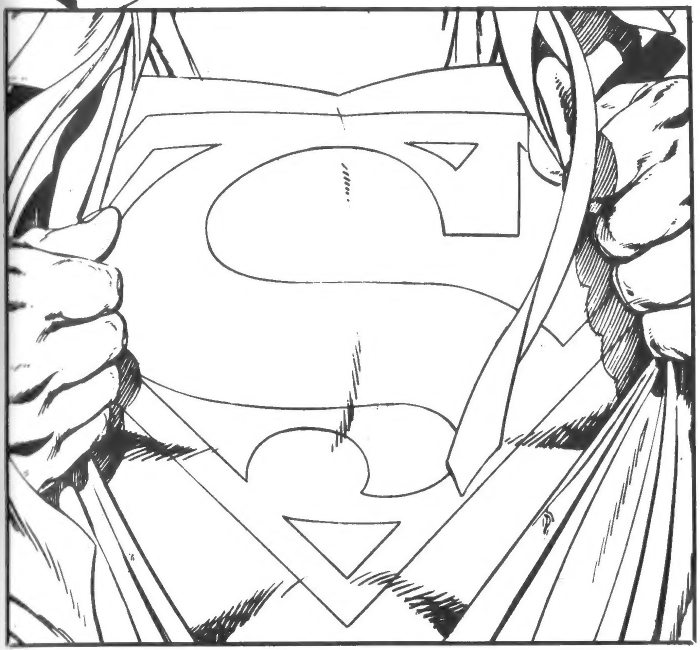

BY JAMES VAN HISE

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DEDICATED TO JOE SHUSTER,
WHO CREATED THE IMAGE.

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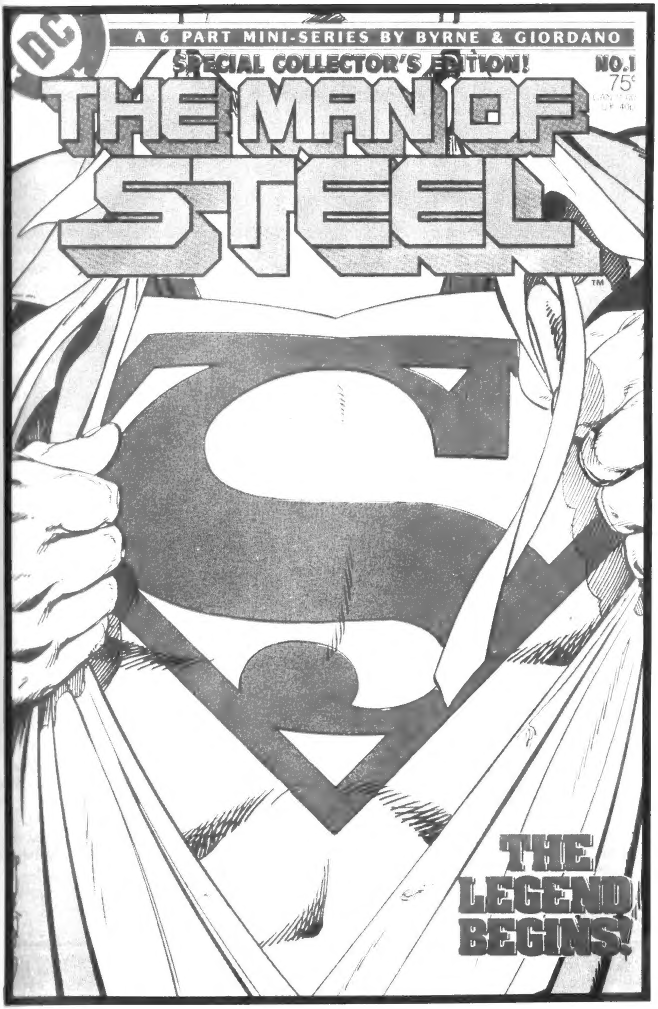

A 6 PART MINI-SERIES BY BYRNE & GIORDANO
SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION!
NO.1
75¢
THE MAN OF STEEL
THE LEGEND BEGINS!

Introduction

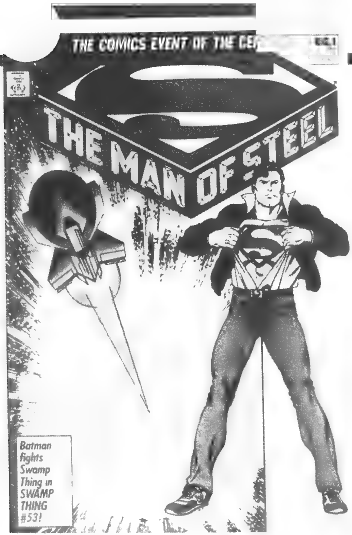
The cover of this comic from the summer of '86 declares it "The Comics Event Of The Century!", which is a rather big promise to live up to. What it actually reveals itself to be is just John Byrne's re-interpretation of the Superman legend as originated by Joe Shuster and Jerry Siegel. This is by no means the first time that the character has had a facelift but it's the first time that DC has made it so all-encompassing. This is because the sale of the Superman family of titles had been on the decline for some time. Reading them we see that they aren't bad stories, just ordinary ones which occasionally are better than average. As with any comic book character, the stories were as good as the writer who penned them. The character wasn't bogged down by his convoluted past any more than any other character is. Frank Miller demonstrated that interesting things could re done with Daredevil by ignoring the dead weight of years of continuity. Just write good stories and cosmetic surgery isn't required. But DC apparently felt that the damage to the Man of Steel went so deep that readers needed to be lured back. This was done when John Byrne expressed interest in taking over the character. In the year which has passed since his takeover, we've seen that Byrne just chucked the old continuity to create a new one, but by and large the stories really aren't any better or worse than what had predated Byrne's takeover. Certainly none of them are as good as the couple stories which Alan Moore did, such as **SUPERMAN ANNUAL** #11 (1985) a year before Byrne's version premiered. That issue is done by Moore and Gibbons, whose '86-'87 miniseries **THE WATCHMEN** may well be judged by posterity as the real comics event as it does do something different with its subject.

While there has been some moaning over "all the changes" Byrne has made with Superman, they're really just superficial. Had they been done in the series without declaring that it was a new era of the character, the changes just would have been accepted as Byrne's interpretation of the character and no more would have been thought of it. **THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS** is accepted as Frank Miller's interpretation of The Batman and he makes no pretense of declaring where or how it fits into the existing continuity. Miller wasn't trying to fit it into continuity--he just wanted to tell a story. It used to be that this is what we read comics for--just to read the story. Now if some event in a story five or fifteen years ago is contradicted, people complain. And yet comics are rife with this. Stan Lee, who created Spider-Man, writes the newspaper strip which has never employed the black costume and has featured such foes as The Kingpin in stories never reflected in the color comics line. So who's to say which is the real Spider-Man continuity--the Marvel Comics version or the newspaper version written by the character's creator? Actually it doesn't matter. Trying to make it matter leads to such odd things as the "new" Man of Steel with stories which just reinterpret characters from the old series in stories which could just have as easily appeared in the pre-Byrne era.

What we'll do in our reviews is examine what Byrne has done with the Man of Steel and see how well it works. Whether or not it's really different from the old Superman isn't important. It sells better than the old Superman, which is all DC really wanted Byrne to accomplish. He did this, and so, from DC's point of view, John Byrne's Man of Steel is clearly a success.

BYRNE
'85

MAN OF STEEL



MAN OF STEEL #1

The origin of Superman is familiar to most every comics reader. Jor-el places his infant son in a rocket and fires it to Earth to save his son from the imminent destruction of the planet Krypton. This is exactly the origin presented in **THE MAN OF STEEL #1**. While the character of Krypton looks cold and sterile, and Kal-el is a test tube baby conceived outside the womb, these are just stylistic changes. It's the way John Byrne sees it just as over the years every retelling of the origin has been filtered through whomever wrote it. The first Christopher Reeve Superman film had yet another interpretation in which the ruling council of Krypton sent an assassin after Jor-el when they thought he was violating his vow not to leave Krypton. That's just as wide a departure from the original presentation of the origin as portraying Krypton as a sterile society in which love is a long forgotten ritual. Nothing about that changes Superman. Certainly seeing the world of his birth as a glittering Edmond Hamilton science fiction paradise is more fun than Byrne's grim interpretation, one is no more set in granite than the other.

Other reinterpretations of the origin could be argued as being just as odd. White Pa Kent keeps his son's origin from him until he's 18, he also tells him to keen his powers a secret. Certainly Clark would have wondered why no one else was invulnerable or could fly long before this. The most interesting thing about this is that Clark is a football hero and not the water boy. He plays up to the best of his ability without feeling guilty about it. Equally important, he's not swell-headed about it. He feels no sense of superiority. If he did he would be Lex Luthor, but more on him later.

Due to the fact that this new intro is squeezed down into six issues, certain things happen too quickly, a fact that Byrne himself admits. For instance, as soon as Clark learns that he's from another world, he decides to leave Smallville and go out into the world to help people when actually he would have worked up to this decision with more deliberation rather than making a snap decision. There is some attempt to bridge this by having Clark perform his super-deeds in secrecy for awhile. He's still trying to figure out where he fits into the scheme of things.

One point of contention among fans has been that when Superman performs his first public deed that he's mobbed by people who all want something from him and this upsets him. This is viewed by some as cynical. Actually I believed this much more than I would a jovial acceptance of his notoriety. Remember, Clark has been operating in secret and without fanfare. To suddenly be thrust into the center of attention would be shocking and disorienting. To go from obscurity to celebrity would bring exactly that feeling--that everyone wants something. Ask any celebrity and they'll tell you that this is exactly what happens. People who have not achieved great success or who are in the shadow of someone who has talent somehow feel that the celebrity owes them something because of their status. Recent Stephen King was asked about the upside and the downside of being a celebrity and he replied, "There is

AND IF ONE DID... WHY, ALL HE'D FIND IS THE SCRAPBOOK OF A STRANGE OLD LADY WHO LIKES TO COLLECT STORIES OF DISASTERS THAT DIDN'T QUITE HAPPEN!
FLOOD WATERS DIVERTED
TOWN SAVED AS HILLSIDE DAMS RIVER.
BRIDGE HOLDS TILL LAST MINUTE!
COLLAPSE WAITS FOR WORKERS TO GET CLEAR
TITANI RAISED
FABULOUS TREASU IN MUSEUM COLLE
FAMINE ENDS IN DESERT
DIVER SAVED AS VESSEL REFLOATS
SHIP MYSTERIOUSLY SES TO SURFACE AGAIN!
CHILD SAVED FROM MOUNTAIN FALL!
REPORTS "FLYING ANGEL" CAUGHT HIM AS HE FELL
AL WAVE NOT HIT COAST
OCEANOGRAPHIC BUREAU LOSS TO EXPLAIN SUDDEN RUPTION OF "TSUNAMI".
EARTH-QUAKE DOES NO

no upside." Wealth and fame brings unique pressures that few of us can understand. So, no, that scene in **MAN OF STEEL** #1 is no "all wrong" as some have maintained. Rather it is chillingly on the mark.

Byrne's interpretation of Clark Kent with glasses and recombed hair doesn't get around that old problem. Superman in glasses still looks like Superman in glasses to anyone who would have met "both" people. Only in the comics...

Having Ma and Pa Kent live rather than having them both conveniently die right before Clark reaches maturity is much better than the way it's usually done. Only in the first Superman film was the death of Pa Kent used to good purpose rather than to just emancipate and unburden the character as it's a comic book cliche to have a super hero's parents dead before he starts fighting crime. I'm glad that Byrne resisted bowing to that silly tradition.

MAN OF STEEL #2

While Superman's costume was created in issue one of this mini-series, it isn't seen in public for the first time until the second volume. In a well constructed splash, we see Superman fly by as glimpsed through a window (the colors are suffused to create the impression of glass between us and him). The scene is rendered from the point of view of Perry White as he sits across from Lois Lane. From the look on her face we know that Perry must have quite an amazed expression on his.

This issue in particular has influences drawn from the first Superman film. While Perry White is no Jackie Cooper, Lois Lane has more than a passing resemblance to Margot Kidder. Her brassy, nothing will stand in her way attitude, is much like the Lois Lane of the first film as well. When she sees Superman flying off she tries to chase him to get the interview she missed during their initial encounter when he saved her life.

It's at this point that we almost meet Lex Luthor. Luthor is in a car and his chauffeur attempts to get Lois to stop and talk to Lex. She turns him down flat and runs on. At the bottom of page 3 we see just the upper part of Luthor's face peering out of the car window. He is very unhappy. But even

though Lois gave Luthor the cold shoulder, she's not above taking advantage of him by calling up one of Luthor's helicopter pilots to give her a lift to scout out the city from the air. Although we don't know much about the new Luthor yet, the 'copter says LEXCORP on the side, as does a building in the background from which we can assume the aircraft took off.

While there are no specific scenes lifted from the Christopher Reeve Superman films, the soul of the first film has been well captured. On page 5 a purse snatcher runs into Superman who admonishes the man and then returns the purse to the victim. The young woman, who is carrying a ghetto blaster, is in turn admonished by Superman for playing her radio a bit too loud. She looks as amazed as the crook did. All of this comes across as outtakes from the sequence in the first film referred to as "Superman's first night out" in which he foils one crime after another, all of varying severity from a cat burglar to a shootout with police. In fact, the scene then switches to a SWAT situation.

Here we see a policeman obviously patterned after Howard, the leader of the SWAT team in ***HILL STREET BLUES*** as he tells a gang holding some people hostage who he is and gives them a minute to come out.. When they react negatively, he even replies. "Damn! I was kinda hoping my reputation would be enough to scare them outta there." When Superman appears, no one knows what's going on. The scene that follows is typical as Superman destroys the gun of one thug and uses his heat vision to make the other weapons too hot to hold. Pretty ordinary stuff, but this is Superman's first appearance before criminals. The same approach is used in the movie ROBOCOP when he first goes out on patrol.

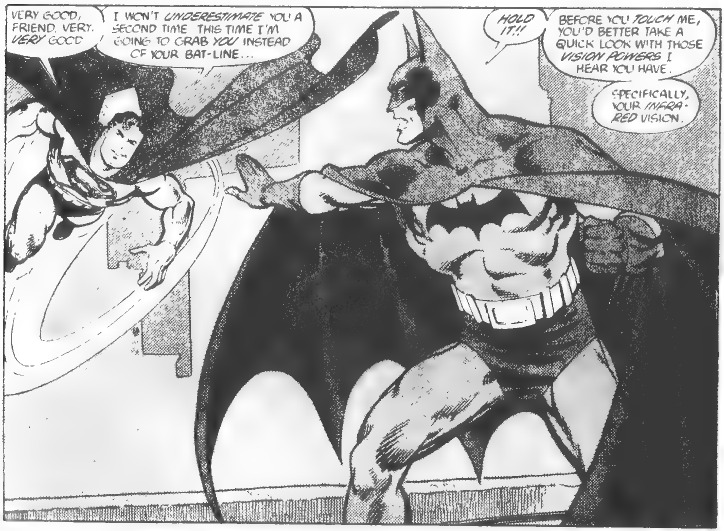
Lois Lane unsuccessfully pursues Superman to get that elusive interview, until she remembers how she first met him. When Superman sees Lois Lane's car in the river, having crashed through a guard rail on a pier. Luckily Superman was in the city when she pulled this stunt, but then she had hidden an aqualung under the front seat, just in case. Crime had dropped way down in Metropolis since Superman's debut, else he wouldn't have had the luxury of giving Lois an interview. Still, she got it through a somewhat underhanded method, which is doubtless how Superman justifies what he does next. When Lois writes up her story and goes in, she finds that she was scooped by a new guy who was just hired. A guy named Clark Kent.

That she resents this newcomer goes without saying, but that won't be addressed in the following issue, nor will the character of the new Lex Luthor. Rather next up will be Superman's first meeting with another costumed crime-fighter.

MAN OF STEEL #3

In those halcyon days of Superman and Batman, they were pals. Before the **CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS**, Superman and Batman had been paired up in **WORLD'S FINEST** comics for 45 years! But this is one of changes in the legend instituted by Byrne. All of those old stories featuring the Superman/Batman team, including the story of how they first met, are all non-functional. This is the new story of how they first met. The story of how young Bruce Wayne met Superboy is obsolete because there never was a Superboy--until it becomes convenient for plot purposes to bring him back, but that's yet another story to be covered later.

At the time that **MAN OF STEEL** #3 appeared, Frank Miller's Dark Knight was making it's initial splash and his characterization of Batman has been accepted as the new one. While the early Seventies saw Denny O'Neil revise Batman so that he became the Dark Knight Detective, more of a creature of the night, this affect was seen in the plots and the art as Batman's personality was not markedly different. But the new Batman, often referred to just as the Dark Knight, is colder and more calculating, willing to rough up a suspect and otherwise play hardball whereas the old Batman was not that brutal, except in self-defense.


VERY GOOD, FRIEND. VERY. VERY GOOD.
I WON'T UNDERESTIMATE YOU A SECOND TIME. THIS TIME I'M GOING TO GRAB YOU INSTEAD OF YOUR BAT-LINE...
HOLD IT.!!
BEFORE YOU TOUCH ME, YOU'D BETTER TAKE A QUICK LOOK WITH THOSE VISION POWERS I HEAR YOU HAVE.
SPECIFICALLY, YOUR INFRA-RED VISION.

This story opens on Batman working over a suspect whom he knows has information that will lead him to a cold blooded killer. That this is the post-crisis Batman is evident in a number of ways, including that Batman's costume doesn't have the yellow spotlight circle around his chest emblem. The thug manages throw something in Batman's face and run away, but before the Dark Knight can catch up to him, Superman appears. He believes, because of his methods, that Batman is a criminal as well, one who operates under a brutal vigilante code that the Man of Steel cannot support. But Batman has anticipated this and holds Superman at bay with the threat of a hidden bomb which will kill an innocent citizen if Superman touches Batman and thus breaks the force field around his body which is keyed to the Man of Steel's super-dense biological material. What Superman never figures out, until Batman admits it, is that the bomb is on his person and it is Batman himself who would have been killed.

The standoff this creates allows Superman to accompany Batman and watch how he works. Seeing him go up against Magpie, a woman who kills the thug who eluded Batman because it never occurred to him to give the Dark Knight misleading information shows the depths of her insanity. The scene when she paralyzes the thug and puts a stick of dynamite in his mouth is very bizarre, as one of her henchmen cries out, "Oh, no boss. Not 'Happy Birthday!' Not 'HAPPY BIRTHDAY!'" is a takeoff on a bit from an old, but little seen, Warner Brothers cartoon about a dog which keeps torturing a cat.

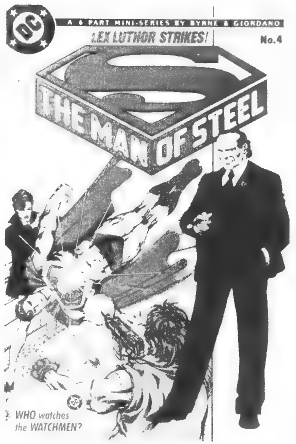
Although superficially they are teamed up in this story, it's not the same as before when they were two friends working together, Superman is grudgingly helping Batman.

The Man of Steel finally comes to understand the Batman's methods, and see that Gotham is a very different city from Metropolis. Even Magpie makes fun of the corrupt police as their predicament makes it easy for her to operate.

By setting up Batman and Superman as characters who tolerate and grudgingly respect one another, this sets up their "final" confrontation in **DARK KNIGHT** #4 (1986) in which Superman, who is now a functionary of the American government, sets out to put a stop to The Batman's brutal vigilante activities, which he can no longer tolerate. There is an early meeting in **DARK KNIGHT** in which it's clear that Superman and Batman know other's secret identities, so this shows

that there is more to their relationship than this initial meeting before their battle decades later.

This story not only shows that Batman is a loner who would never want to team up with Superman, but it also shows Superman to be a loner who finds it difficult to tolerate anyone's point of view other than his own when it comes to fighting crime. It's no wonder that the Man of Steel is not in the new Justice League.



MAN OF STEEL #4
"Enemy Mine..."

This issue introduces the new Lex Luthor, who is a very different character from the Luthor who plagued the Man of Steel for the past several decades. Originally Luthor was someone who was a friend of Superboy. When some.sort of accident in his lab caused him to blame Superboy for the loss of his hair, he vowed eternal vengeance. That's a rather slim premise on which to build a career of villainy, but I'm just writing it as it happened. The best use of Luthor in the old series is in **SUPERMAN** #149 in the imaginary story "The Death of Superman" in which he succeeds in killing the man of steel with Kryptonite poisoning. It's one of the few times that the so-called "imaginary" stories took advantage of the format to come up with something which was far outside of the normal continuity.

"Enemy Mine" establishes Lex Luthor as a rich megalomaniac, the third richest man in the world who believes that because he controls commerce, that this also gives him control over people.

The hints of some sort of relationship between Luthor and Lois Lane are clearly explored in this story as we learn that the "relationship" is just a reflection of Luthor's warped view of reality.

As the story opens, Lois arrives at Clark's apartment to pick him up on her way to a lavish shipboard bash being thrown by Mr. Luthor. We see a wide shot of Clark's apartment which is very nicely decorated with bookshelves, a sofa, stereo, VCR and a desk. Lois refers to it as "almost Spartan" but the room has a little too many lavish furnishings for that. Rather it's just very neat and orderly, such as the coffee table which has nothing on it and the desk looks as though it has never been used. Spartan would more accurately qualify if the room had nothing more than a sofa and a tv set.

A subplot emerges which has been dropped long time since, that being Lois Lane's resentment over Clark getting the scoop on Superman and beating her to it by mere hours. Eighteen months have passed since then but she still resents it.

We also see that Clark's hair does grow, and how he can shave it since normal implements won't cut it. While with the old version of Superman they just stated that his hair doesn't grow under a yellow sun, Clark's hair does indeed sprout regularly and he uses a piece of metal from his rocket to reflect his heat vision back at his face and sheer off the exposed whiskers.

After being transported to Luthor's yacht via helicopter, we meet Lex Luthor on page 8. He's a slightly portly, balding man with a crown of red hair. Like many such people, he's very vain and believes himself to be the height of charm. His lack of any sort of real ties to Lois Lane quickly becomes apparent when he casually mentions that the Paris original gown he'd had delivered to her apartment was not a loan, but a gift. Lois explodes in anger because Luthor is once again trying to buy her affections. She's so furious at his temerity that she borrows Clark's coat and strips off the dress to hand back to a very surprised Lex Luthor. But just as she prepares to leave, the boat is hijacked by terrorists.

In most any other comic, this would have followed along the cliche route, and at first it seems to. Clark manages to get himself knocked on the head and pitched overboard (where he's, of course, rescued by Superman. And then Superman arrives and deals with the hostage situation and captures the terrorists. The twists occur when Lois gets one of the guns and takes out.some of the thugs herself.

When all is said and done, Luthor reveals that he anticipated this and had his own security forces standing by in case Superman failed to arrive as anticipated. This doesn't explain why they didn't intervene on Kent's behalf, but it does set up an interesting situation. Since the Mayor and other city officials are present, they express outrage at the way they were put in jeopardy by gunman--and the Mayor orders the arrest of Luthor. Luthor doesn't believe that Superman, or anyone, would have the temerity to do such a thing. He's wrong. While we don't see Luthor as he's dragged off to the pokey, we do see him being booked and fingerprinted like any ordinary thug, and it makes Luthor snap. He actually later confronts Superman and makes it clear that he's declaring war on the Man of Steel. Luthor actually believes that he runs Metropolis and he's crazed at the thought that people now look up to Superman as the most powerful man in Metropolis. He makes it clear that one day soon, Superman will die, and although there won't be a shred of evidence to prove, Luthor wants Superman to know that his death will be the result of Luthor's vendetta. His mention that he'll never be arrested again makes it clear that even though he only spent two hours in jail, that he couldn't stand being treated as an ordinary person. He believes himself superior to such things. He's wrong and he doesn't like it when he's shown that his version of the world and reality don't always mesh.

WELL WELL! LOIS SEEMS TO HAVE THINGS NICELY IN HAND.
I GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE SURPRISED BY HER SKILL WITH THAT WEAPON.
BEING AN ARMY BRAT SHE WAS BOUND TO HAVE PICKED UP SOME TRICKS.

MAN OF STEEL #5
"The Mirror, Crack'd..."

Bizarro is an oddball version of Superman introduced in the early Sixties in a story written by Otto Binder. The character was unfortunately reduced to just a running joke very quickly, with his broken English and insistence on doing everything backwards and doing everything the opposite from Superman. The Bizarro Superman even somehow created a square imitation of Earth populated my many more Bizarros. A couple years ago Saturday Night Live even had a running series using the Bizarro world to do political humor.

John Byrne's Bizarro seems to be a one time only appearance, and in fact only old time readers will even recognize what this character is supposed to be since he never identifies it by name.

The story opens with Superman holding up an armored figure whom he seems to be addressing as Luthor. People who'd been reading the series as recently as 5 years ago would recognize this suit as the armor worn by the revised Lex Luthor when George Perez designed this costume. But we find that this is just an operative wearing this battle armor comprised of components which Luthor claims were all stolen. Since the suit destroys the mind of anyone who wears it more than an hour, Superman cannot even question the man inside.

Even that attack had been just a lure so that Superman could be scanned and his molecular structure copied by a device which can imitate any known life form. But while the operation is a success, the Superman duplicate which emerges collapses and seemingly dies. Luthor is furious at the failure and he throws out the scientist and his dead creation. Luthor wanted to have a Superman that would have all the powers of the real one but work only for him. He's very disappointed when he fails.

For plot convenience, Lois Lane suddenly has a sister, Lucy, who was blinded the year before when a hijacker threw chemicals in her face. She's a former airline attendant (they're not called "stewardesses" any more) who's not adjusting to her new life very well. In fact, right after Lois leaves for the office, Lucy decides that she's had enough and hurls herself off the balcony of their high rise apartment. But as luck and story continuity would have it, she's save by Superman, or is it? A nod's as good as a wink to a blind man and Lucy thinks she was saved by Superman, but actually it's a mute duplicate. This duplicate tries to copy Superman's actions and helps carry a stranded ambulance to the hospital, but when the paramedics see their rescuer, they dub him a monster. When he rescues Lucy, a strange dust brushes off on her, but we still don't see his face ourselves (unless you want to thumb forward a couple pages to take a quick peek).

Since it possesses some of Superman's memories, it turns up in the lobby of the Daily Planet wearing a coat and pants, but with his cape dragging. He's also putting on glasses to try to look like Clark Kent. When he turns around we see a face that looks much like the way the Frankenstein monster has often been portrayed in comics. He doesn't have the skin filled with spiderweb cracks the way the original Bizarro. does, but then this creature is never referred to as the Bizarro (why, he doesn't even wear a sign around his neck which says Bizarro No. 1).

What he lacks in communications skills, this copy doesn't lack in power. It knocks Superman across the street and into a bus which has a sign advertising "Hackers Cigarettes."

What follows is your pretty standard Superman fight in which he discovers that his foe is as powerful as he, has heat vision which can harm him, and who flies off with Lois Lane when it sees her.

Superman somehow guesses that this odd double may perhaps share some of his memories and be attracted to Lois and he thinks, "I've got to stop him before something really tragic happens!" 1 wonder what he could mean by that? We get a clue with the thing halts in mid-flight and kisses Lois. It flies her back to her apartment where Lucy reveals that. after "Superman" saved her, she realized that her sight was returning. But when the

real Superman arrives, the phony starts attacking him again.

Superman has recognized that it keeps shedding some sort of dust and from this figures out that it's not human. He then feels free to attack it full out and when the two superbeings collide, only a rain of dust remains of the double and Lucy can see again. Ever the optimist, Superman thinks that somehow the thing knew that would happen.

This is a very typical and straightforward story. There's nothing strange and new entered into the Superman lore as the thing is not even called a Bizarro. It's also an example of how little the Superman series has really changed from the previous series before Byrne as this story could have appeared in any of those issues. As is the case with most of the Byrne Superman stories, they aren't really measurably better than what came before, just different, but different is apparently what readers wanted. This story is very simple and its lack of complexities does tend to capture the charm of the pre-Sixties Superman when the object was just to tell a story, not to worry about continuity details that 98% of the current readership wouldn't even notice. By this issue, Byrne's Superman has already settled into a comfortable groove. There won't be much in the way of surprises from here on out.

MAN OF STEEL ISSUE 6

"The Haunting"

Superman left Smallville at the end of the first issue of this mini-series so it's only fitting that the final volume should return him to his old homestead. Unlike earlier versions of the Superman legend, his foster-parents are still alive. The old couple meet Clark at the bus station, which he uses to cover his arrival in Smallville by changing to his civilian identity at super-speed. We can see the bond between Clark and these lovely people as he genuinely enjoys spending time with his family to escape the pressures of life in the big city. Smallville is an idyllic place, not unlike the version portrayed in the recent Superman motion pictures.

Clark has returned home to get away from it all and to reassess his life and the directions it's currently taking. While he enjoys a private life away from being Superman, he feels that it's incomplete. He's considering telling Lois Lane the truth about himself and asking her to marry him. While he doesn't come right and and say that this is what he's considering, it is clear that this is where his considerations are heading. But this is before he learns more about himself and how he truly fits into the shape of reality.

The first event which leads to a new self-realization occurs that night. Feeling restless, he goes downstairs to have another piece of his mother's superb rhubarb pie. The last thing he could have expected is that a glowing, strangely garbed stranger would appear in front of him, speaking in a language unknown to Clark. When the figure reaches out and touches him, Clark finds himself in the grip of a vivid hallucination, apparently conceived to impart information to him. In the vision he encounters his real parents but doesn't understand who they are but can suddenly understand what they're saying and even speak

that strange tongue himself. Glancing out a window, Superman sees that he's on another planet.

Awakening, Clark finds himself outdoors with Lana Lang, an old high school friend. In talking, Clark learns that she had only recently returned to Smallville, having left after something that Clark did to her.

This is the second phase of Clark's new self-perception as he comes to more fully realize just how he affects people, particularly those who know him well--or who believed that they did.

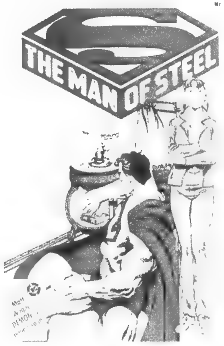
Ten years before, on the eve of Clark's departure from Smallville, he visited Lana Lang, who is secretly in love with him. She'd been hoping that he'd propose. Instead, Clark explains his philosophy of life, that this is a world where one man can make a difference, and that he might well be that man. Instead of explaining, he demonstrates by taking Lana on a flight around the world, in his arms. In that moment she realized that Clark could never belong to her, or to any woman, because he belonged to the world. It shattered Lana's self-perception because while she had imagined that she and Clark might one day marry, Superman transformed Clark into someone who was more than just a star athlete. Clark's own dumbfounded reaction to Lana's explanation shows that he didn't realize himself how different Superman made him. The scene at the bottom of page 14 when she states that she understand that Clark shared his secret with her out of love is quite touching as his face is sad and very self-aware as she relates this to him.

To complicate matters, when Superman goes to where his rocket had been hidden, he's shocked to discover it missing. Marks on the ground indicate that a truck had hauled it away some time before.

He encounters the image of his father again and once more his mind feels as though it's under attack. When the (hologram?) image is shorted out by a metal shovel hurled into it, Clark returns to normal. But now he understand what's been happening to him and who those people were--as well as the fact that he originates from another planet. It's clear to him now that while he's the product of that world and is Superman because of his origin, that being raised on Earth has truly made him human.

This is the best issue of the six as it captures the human side of Superman most strongly. The scenes with his aged parents are nice but also pleasantly ordinary. When he's with Lana the contrast between being a man and a Superman comes out most strongly. He doesn't just help people by being Superman, he has an impact on their lives and on other people's perceptions of reality just because he exists. He's important to the whole world--too important to ever allow himself to be devoted to only one person, even a wife. This is very sad but it's also something that he must have already realized on some level when he chose to be that one man who could make a difference in the world. Taking on the world is a full time job, and then some.

The subplot regarding the stolen spaceship is resolved in the first issue of the new **SUPERMAN** magazine.

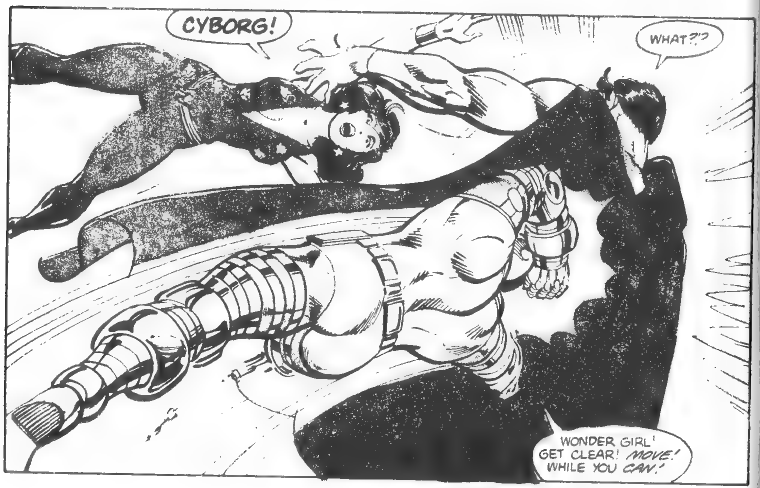


ACTION COMICS

ACTION 584
"Squatter!"

Out of all the Superman stories which Byrne has written to date, this is by far the most ordinary. Once again John Byrne seems to have riffled through a pile of old **SUPERMAN** comics and come up with an oft repeated plot which he'd like to try his hand at. And so once again, Superman goes on a rampage and it's because he's not himself today. Considering that this is the first *new* issue of **ACTION COMICS**, one would have thought that Byrne would have done something different than a story in which he does nothing more than give us a business as usual plot. This story could easily have appeared in the pre-Byrne Superman comics (and did in one form or another) which he was supposed to be revamping and updating. All we have here is your typical boring action story in which nothing of any consequence happens and when it's all over all we remember is that it was drawn real well!

The story opens with a tv journalist reporting from downtown New York just as Superman flies on the scene and begins smashing into skyscrapers. Since this is the city where the Teen Titans are located, one of them is nearby. As pieces from the upper storey of a building start cascading down, Cycborg manages to clamber up high enough to pulverize the metal and glass to dust



rio that it doesn't fall on anyone and hurt them.

Cycborg recognizes that Superman is acting strange in other ways, such as screaming about how superior he is to others, as though he's reveling in his power. But wouldn't a man who's had this power all his life be accustomed to it by now?

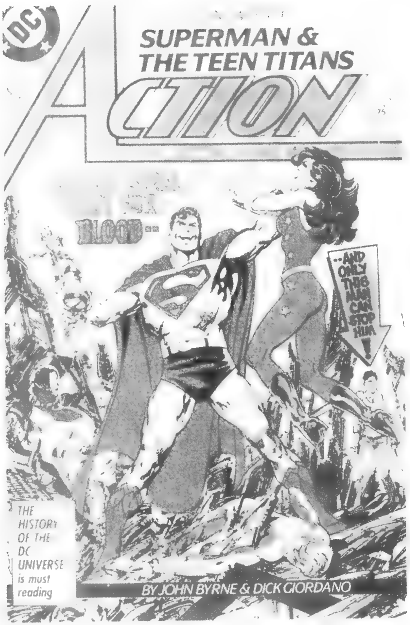
In getting Superman's attention, he just infuriates him and the Man of Steel responds by chopping off Cyborg's robot arm and then throwing him off the roof of the building. He's barely able to slow his fall enough to land unhurt. He calls the Titans Tower and who answers but Changeling who does a riff on Moonlighting. This scene I didn't believe because, while Garfield is often portrayed as a bit goofy, this is just plane stupid because people don't tend to call Titans Tower except on urgent business. This scene makes the seams in the story show.

Changeling and Wonder Girl arrive downtown and confront Superman. Changeling and Wonder Girl both give Superman a tough fight, but he defeats them.

Finally the inevitable happens and Jericho shows up. This is a character who only has to meet the eyes of his opponent to be able to take over the other's body. A power like this means that most battles should end just the way that this one does. It's to Marv Wolfman's credit that he's been able to work around this.

As soon as Jericho takes over Superman's body, the real Superman conveniently shows up in the body of a crippled man. The man is a scientist who developed a brain exchange device and everyone just returns to the inventor's home and reveres the process. The scientist then gets a tongue lashing from Superman about how the man has wasted his life and proven that his physical disability has nothing to do with how miserable his life is since he showed himself to be a bully and a thug as soon as he had Superman's body.

What isn't dealt with here is that this man has invented something miraculous. He could name his own price for such a thing as the rich would be willing to buy it so that those with terminal illnesses could use it to get new bodies, possibly by paying bums for giving up their bodies. The scientist himself could escape from his crippled form in the same manner, although it certainly raises a lot of ethical questions, but then that's what makes the idea interesting. Certainly these are more interesting facets of the concept worth exploring than Superman beating up the Teen Titans. In fact this can still be done in another story. Certainly Luthor would not be above taking advantage of such a device and profiting by it.



.ACTION COMICS #585
"And Graves Give Up Their Dead..."

The Phantom Stranger is a mysterious character who originally appeared in a scarce six issue series published in the pre-Code days of DC in 1952 and '53. This is not to say that DC ever did anything back then which would have fallen outside of what was acceptable for general audiences, but it does give the series a certain mystique. It was then largely forgotten until **SHOWCASE** #80 reprinted some Phantom Stranger stories and the DC launched an all new series in 1969. While his series was gone, the character had been popping up all across the DC landscape until he again received his own book a few months ago. His background is shrouded in mystery but he comes across as a very subdued version of a cross between Dr. Strange and The Spectre. He tends to be on hand when supernatural events occur and he somehow manages to manipulate events which in turn manipulate people that in turn effect the outcome of the supernatural situation. He comes and goes mysteriously and seems to have a great deal of power but also has the confidence in himself to rarely use it.

This story opens as Phantom Stranger stories generally do, with him observing one event and showing how it leads to something very different. Superman is battling a sorceress named Arathaza and we enter the sequence at its climax. Superman, reduced by magic to an aged, white-haired version of himself, is trapped in her lair and seemingly defeated. But just then Superman grabs her magic staff and shatters it, causing all of the magic to be undone, including that which had created the sky palace.

But the focal point of the magic is a gem which is hurled a hundred miles away and falls in a graveyard. The ground reacts to the presence of the gem by rippling and then exploding. One has to wonder that if the Phantom Stranger saw all this, why he didn't do anything to stop it, but then that would have nipped the plot in the bud, wouldn't it?

Superman is just returning to his apartment when upon entering through the window he finds The Phantom Stranger. Superman tries to turn him down, suggesting that the Stranger try someone like Dr. Fate since Superman is no more resistant to magic than any other mortal. But in a twinkling of an eye, Superman finds that the Stranger has transported both of them to the scene of the disturbance a hundred miles away.

Something akin to a living tornado is in the graveyard and when Superman attacks, it fights back. When Superman hears it speak he discovers that it's alive, but the Stranger assures him that it is not.

Telling Superman to contain the force, the Stranger enters the form to deal more directly with the menace.

Since this was a graveyard where only the worst criminals were buried, the source of the disturbance is evil. Inside are the corpses of the damned, denied access to the afterlife. Now they hope to have a second chance at life.

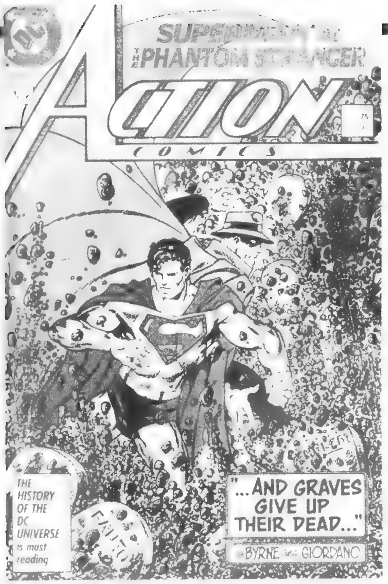
Outside, Superman halts the progress of the thing which had been growing larger by adding land to its mass. By cutting a trench down to the bedrock, the thing stops its movement towards Metropolis. One would think, though, that within a hundred miles there would be other cities on the way to Metropolis.

Inside, The Phantom Stranger confronts the evil dead with the souls of their victims until he uncovers the gem which gave the dead life. The things try to attack but are fought off by their dead victims until the entire thing begins to collapse.

The Stranger appears to Superman and tells him to break the monstrosities contact with the Earth, so Superman tunnels under it and lifts the living graveyard into space.

When it's all over, The Stranger gives Superman the magic gem and the Man of Steel crushes it into powder. But after all that, the Stranger refuses to tell Superman what happened inside the thing they defeated.

This is an interesting team-up in that Superman and The Phantom Stranger are about as different

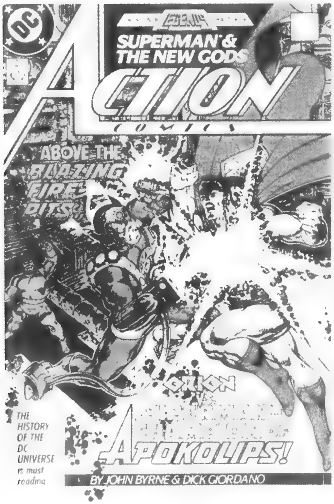

SUPERMAN AND THE PHANTOM STRANGER
ACTION COMICS
THE HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE is must reading
"...AND GRAVES GIVE UP THEIR DEAD..."
BYRNE and GIORDANO

SUPERMAN!
YOU MUST ACT QUICKLY NOW!
THE FOCUS OF THE MONSTER'S POWER IS DIVERTED. BREAK ITS CONTACT WITH THE EARTH!
"BREAK"...? STRANGER, WHAT DO YOU...?

NOR HAVE I ANY INTENTION OF DOING SO, SUPERMAN.
FORGIVE THE CLICHÉ, MY FRIEND...
...BUT THERE ARE SOME THINGS MAN WAS NOT MEANT TO KNOW!
END
22

as can be. One is sheer power and the other is a magical being who can control Superman if he wished. The plot is very straightforward without any subplots, but it is interesting in the way it opens. . It makes us feel that we've come in on the end of a continued story when actually these events are not chronicled anywhere else.

Again, this is a story which could just as easily appeared in the pre-John Byrne Superman comics. It's just a matter of style, folks. John Byrne's got the style that comics fans like and so Superman has been revitalized where it counts, in the readership.


DC
SUPERMAN & THE NEW GODS
ACTION COMICS
ABOVE THE BLAZING FIRE PITS!
THE HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE is must reading
APOKOLIPS!
BY JOHN BYRNE & DICK GIORDANO

ACTION #586
"The Champion!"

This is the concluding segment in a three part story which began in SUPERMAN #3 and continues in **THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN** #426 and climaxes in this issue of **ACTION COMICS**. Superman was brought to Apokolips by Darkseid where he was hurled into the fire-pits which caused him to lose his memory and seemingly his powers as well. But thanks to Granny Goodness, she has been training him and convinced him that he is the son of Darkseid. The evil Lord of Apokolips uses this when he learns that Orion (who actually is Darkseid's son, but who was raised on New Genesis) and Lightray are approaching Apokolips, apparently on a mission of mercy to rescue Superman.

Part of the plot against Superman is Amazing Grace, who had masqueraded as a prisoner of Darkseid's forces until she escaped with Superman's assistance. We see that she is just as much under Darkseid's thumb as anyone in Apokolips as he rules by power, intimidation and fear. Anyone who questions his decisions could very well face death, but that's typical for these type of characters. Darkseid may have predated Darth Vader by several years, but he's still your basic villain who kills those who fail him. Such a concept has never been very logical since who would hang around if their life is measured only until they make a mistake.

Darkseid manipulates Superman into going off to fight Orion and Lightray, who have actually been sent by the Highfather of New Genesis to rescue Superman. They have a fight that lasts for

several pages until Orion takes off his mask. Somehow his "grim visage" is supposed to be strong enough to give men, even Superman, pause. But Byrne just copies the face Jack Kirby drew for Orion and Kirby was never able to make Orion look ugly--he made him look like Ben Grimm in human form, which is to say like an ordinary (as opposed to heroically handsome) man. Were Orion to look somewhat like Darkseid but in human form, perhaps this would accomplish the intended effect. As it is, when he takes off his helmet, we really don't understand what the big deal is. He looks pretty ordinary to me. Perhaps on New Genesis looking ordinary instead of heroically handsome is a horrifying fate to endure.

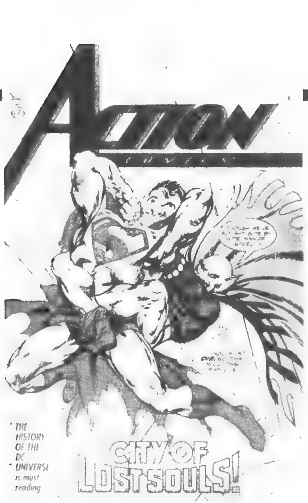
Meanwhile, Lightray encounters Amazing Grace who attempts to seduce him, but he's pure of heart and so she fails. He leaves her to what he knows will not be the tender mercies of Darkseid. Lightray even gloats about this, but doesn't he realize that Amazing Grace and many others in Apokolips do Darkseid's bidding or die for refusing? One would think he would at least offer her sanctuary.

The plot is then resolved very easily with the Mother Box, a sort of all purpose computer which cures Superman's amnesia and even gives him back his costume! It should be called the *deus ex machina* box.

At least there is a good confrontation between Superman and Darkseid, but even this is cut short when Darkseid returns Superman to Earth via a "Boom Tube."

This story has interesting points as well as points which are not thought through enough. Orion without his mask is not a startling sight any more than the image of John Byrne's face in the comic would be. The annoyance of the Mother Box has long been debated regarding the New Gods. I remember when Mister Miracle was introduced and how disappointed many of us were when he was tied to the New Gods rather than being the good, unrelated character he should have been. Part of this disappointment was the crutch of the Mother Box.

The New Gods definitely have elements interesting to explore. The first part of the story in **SUPERMAN** #3 seemed to promise a lot of this, but the conclusion seemed a hurried attempt to tie it all together and wrap it up.



ACTION COMICS 587
"Cityscape!"

In the early Seventies when Jack Kirby created the New Gods and all the related titles, he did come uo with one which had no connection to them. It was called **THE DEMON.** It deals with an expert in the supernatural, Jason Blood, who is able to turn into the demon Etrigan. The Demon itself is a tribute to Hal Foster Prince Valiant as in an early episode Val disguised himself as a demon in order to defeat an ogre, and the demon guise Val created looks almost exactly like Etrigan. While a lot of comics artists today draw their influences from the Sixties, which is when they grew up, Jack Kirby grew up in the Thirties and artists like Hal Foster and Alex Raymond were the heroes of young creators in those days. Since Foster wasn't really an action artist, Kirby didn't draw many influences from him, but it's unquestionable that he long admired Foster's work.

The story opens in a curio shop which Jason Blood and his friends are visiting. Glenda Mark opens a strange little object which suddenly pierces her arm and turns her into a delicate crystalline structure which in turns seeks out the other people in the room and transforms them as well. Only Jason Blood escapes by transforming himself into Etrigan. But the structure continues to grow, using human beings to swell in size, but . Etrigan doesn't have a clue on how to reverse the spell, even if it could be reversed. For all he knows, these people may all be dead.

This takes place in Gotham City and Superman is flying nearby and sees the constructions growing. Without trying to find out what is actually happen, he just assumes that they don't belong there and proceeds to destroy them. Etrigan intervenes and finally convinces Superman of the mistake he's made by showing him that the building is bleeding where the Man of Steel smashed into it. Superman is shocked. He is opposed to the taking of life and now he has thoughtlessly been. responsible for the loss of human lives.

Etrigan explains that the only way to undo what has happened is to see to it that it never happened at all, and he sends Superman back in time. There he encounters Jason Blood in 1162 A.D., but since this is the same Jason Blood, Etrigan was not bale to travel back along his own timeline.

Blood figures out where a supernatural distur-

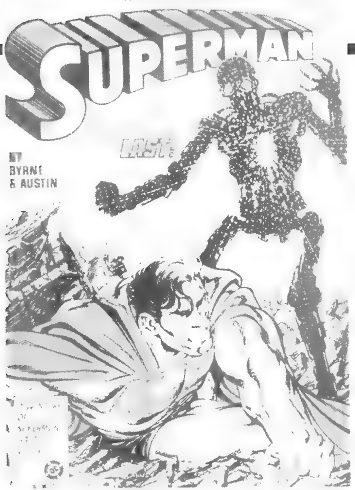
bance is happening and Superman flies him there. Upon reaching their destination, Blood becomes Etrigan and crashes into what seems to be a shack where an old man lives with his daughter. But Etrigan knows that the child is really.Margaine Le Fey in disguise. When the witch is revealed she's drawn by Byrne the way that Jack Kirby would draw her, so she almost looks more like a robot and not at all like a cliche' twelfth century witch.

Although the witch imprisons Etrigan and Superman in a prison of stone too strong for the demon to break out of, it's not too strong for Superman. Since the stone was only reshaped by magic but isn't actually magical itself, Superman has no trouble smashing it. When Superman uses his own body to disrupt the spell, time snaps back to the way it had been the moment that Jason Blood and his friends entered the curio shop. The page of art on 21 is even the same as page one except for the last panel. It's one of the few times I've found a full circle plot to be interesting.

ACTION COMICS has become a Superman team-up book in which Byrne is able to draw many other DC characters while also doing Superman. The possibilities are endless, and sometimes a bit on the wild side as we'll see in forthcoming issues.

YES, MAN OF STEEL
BLOOD.
THE BLOOD OF INNOCENTS!
INNOCENTS ETRIGAN HAS STRUGGLED TO PROTECT.
FOR EACH OF THESE TOWERS IS A TRANSFORMED HUMAN BEING.
MANY NOW MORTALLY WOUNDED BY YOUR ACTIONS, SUPERMAN.
MANY NOW DYING BECAUSE OF YOU!
N-NO...
HOW COULD THAT BE?
HOW COULD THIS TERRIBLE THING HAVE HAPPENED?
THAT MATTERS LESS NOW THAN HOW IT MAY BE UNDONE.
UNDONE...?
YOU...YOU MEAN THERE'S STILL A CHANCE TO SAVE THESE PEOPLE?
HOW, DEMON?
HOW?!?

SUPERMAN



SUPERMAN #1 --
"Heart of Stone"

In the final issue of the **MAN OF STEEL** mini-series, Superman found that the rocket which had brought him to Earth from Krypton had been stolen. It had been hidden in a field under a cover on his foster-parents farm. Why it hadn't been better hidden than that is never explained. In the recent movies it was hidden under the floor of the Kent's barn where it would have been much more difficult for someone to stumble across it, even if they were looking for something. But then if they'd handled things properly, where would this issue's story have come from?

Just as John Byrne revised the old Bizarro story from **SUPERBOY** #68 when he did **MAN OF STEEL** #5, so too does he rework the original tale of Metallo. In the original story, a thief is pulled out of an auto wreck by a scientist who puts his brain in a robot body. In the original, the robot body can be powered either by uranium (which must be replaced each day) or by Kryptonite, which will power it forever. The original Metallo got a job at the Daily Planet and made Lois Lane believe he was Superman, whereupon she shamelessly fawns all over him. He finally dies when he uses the Kryptonite from his own body to attack Superman while substituting a display piece to power his form, but the display piece was fake and it killed him.

Byrne takes the basic elements of this premise and as the story in this issue progresses, he reveals that Metallo was a man in an accident who was rescued and his brain put in a robot body by a scientist who believes that the Earth is secretly being invaded by aliens from space. He detected the rocket which brought baby Kal-el to Earth and years later tracked it down in Smallville.

Superman finds the laboratory of this scientist, but the man is long dead. It's a disturbing place for Superman to visit as it's clear that this scientist had been spying on him for years. But he didn't die from any accident. When Metallo became aware of his invincibility, he killed the scientist to get the madman out of the way. Superman stores the entire chunk of land containing the lab in orbit around Earth, presumably to preserve it for the police. This is apparently just a self-delusion on his part as the vacuum of space would change certain things in the lab, plus it's clear that the professor learned a great deal about Superman, including the acquisition of Kryptonite.

Back in Metropolis, as luck and John Byrne would have it, Clark meets Metallo while he's out jogging with Lois. When he uses one of the usual methods of slipping away to change to Superman he finds that Metallo is much more than he bargained for and doesn't understand why his powers seem to fade just as Metallo strikes him.

Byrne thankfully avoids the typical cliche in that when Metallo is working Superman over and the Man of Steel asks why Metallo wants to kill him, the villain chooses not to answer rather than making the obligatory comic book speech which reveals all the clues. Superman doesn't know who Metallo is or that he's connected to the lab and the dead man that he found. We know because we see Metallo's memories of when he

awoke to his new body. Metallo is actually on the verge of strangling Superman when the police intervene. They slow him down momentarily but he rises again and attacks, this time revealing not only that he has a Kryptonite heart, but cluing Superman in that such a thing as Kryptonite even exists, and that it can kill him. Metallo also reveals that he knows that Superman is of alien origin, something that Lois Lane is quite startled to hear.

The time period covered in the **MAN OF STEEL** mini-series seems to be about 28 years--from the time of Superman's birth up to ten years after he left home. From references we know in issue 5 that he has been Superman as the world knows him for five years and issue 6 seems to add another 5 years of elapsed time based on what Lana Lang says. This causes some confusion when we move into the regular series because we're uncertain how much time has elapsed between the two, but apparently it was only a couple of weeks as Superman only recently learned of his alien origins and hadn't revealed them to anyone outside of his family. So Lois Lane is quite shocked to hear this statement from a man who is gleefully in the middle of beating the Man of Steel to within an inch of his life.

Equally disturbed is Lex Luthor who learns that someone else is about to polish off Superman and deprive him of his revenge. He promised to kill Superman himself and Lex Luthor always keeps his promises.

As the fight progresses, even a collapsing building isn't enough to finish off Metallo. He rises from the rubble looking like The Terminator after the gas truck explosion and continues moving in on Superman. He even opens his chest cavity to expose Superman more fully to the Kryptonite as he moves in for the kill. But Superman continues to fight back, refusing to give up even as he's dying. But just at the last possible moment, a shadow falls over them and Metallo is gone. Superman is saved, and he can guess by whom.

While Luthor wanted to be personally responsible for Superman's death, certainly he must have figured that the Man of Steel would figure that Luthor was somehow behind something as bizarre as Metallo. But since he wasn't, Luthor the purist removes the interference so that he may kill Superman another day.

But Superman knows that anyone who has Metallo, has the Kryptonite and that it will no doubt return to plague him in some other form. He's only gained a reprieve.

HOW PATHETIC... DON'T YOU EVEN HAVE THE SENSE TO KNOW WHEN YOU'RE FINISHED?
YOU TALK A GOOD DEATH SCENE, METALLO..
BUT... SO FAR IT'S STILL... JUST TALK..

SUPERMAN #2
"The Secret Revealed"

In Lex Luthor's computer center, a face appears on the screen, a face picked out of the crowd at many of the public appearances of Superman, beginning three weeks after his debut. This has been acquired from all available news footage of the Man of Steel in action. Since Luthor is attempting to learn as much about Superman as he can, he finds this information particularly fascinating. Her face does not appear in any footage in the last six months, though. We know what this is all about because this is Lana Lang, Clark Kent's childhood sweetheart and we learned that she returned to Smallville in **MAN OF STEEL** #6, which means that now that Superman is appearing in regular titles rather than the special mini-series, that continuity has settled down to normal rather than jumping around from issue to issue the way it did before.

Apparently because he was the first one to land an exclusive with Superman, Clark Kent's background is being investigated as well for any ties between the two, such as whether they knew each other as children.

Luthor's obsession with Superman is such that it allows us to see his true persona by the way he treats his employees as they work on this project. When one woman explains that it will be difficult finding the person in the films since she hasn't been seen in six months, Luthor raises his fist to her and makes it clear that he isn't interested in hearing excuses for any further delays. Then when he invites Amanda, the project head, out for dinner that evening, he makes it clear that this was not just an invitation, it was an order.

Then Luthor enters another section of the complex where Metallo is imprisoned. Superman was correct when he assumed that Luthor had captured the robot. Metallo is furious with Luthor for stopping him from killing Superman, but Lex states that this is a please reserved for no one but himself. He is grateful to Metallo for bringing Kryptonite to him, though. The scientist in charge of studying Metallo explains that there is no way they can remove the Kryptonite without killing the robot man. Luthor finds this an easy problem to solve and just reaches into Metallo's chest and plucks the stone out, whereupon Metallo dies screaming. So just as Metallo died in the original story from having the Kryptonite removed from his chest, so too does this new version of Metallo die. Back in the old Superman comics, though, a good idea seldom stayed dead long and so thereafter anyone with a robot body and human brain was referred to by the generic usage of the term "Metallo," including a story with a Metallo Clark Kent which came about when Red Kryptonite split Superman and Clark Kent into two different beings. Kent didn't fare to well on his own. Byrne hasn't yet introduced Red K into the new legend, and probably won't until he runs out of other story ideas.

Back in Smallville, two hired thugs move in on the Kent farm and ransack the place after using knockout darts on the old Kents. All they find is a scrapbook of Superman's exploits, but as they're leaving they're seen by Lana Lang. They capture her and drag her along to get further orders since they're not allowed to kill on this mission.

Back at Lexcorp, Luthor is entertaining Miss Amanda, who is scared "spitless" (one of those comic book words never used by real human beings) of displeasing Lex. Luthor is unhappy to have his evening interrupted by Security and reluctantly goes to see what they want. His anger turns to pleased surprise when he sees that the mystery girl has been brought in. But he's informed that she is allergic to drugs and any attempts at using any so-called "truth drugs" would kill her before she could ever answer any questions.

Meanwhile, Superman finds himself being pursued by a flying electronic eye which he dodges and avoids while vibrating himself so that it cannot take any clear pictures of him. He's especially leery after finding that lab which had been created by someone who had been spying on him. When he tries to grab the device, it explodes

JOHN BYRNE & TERRY AUSTIN
SUPERMAN
THE SECRET REVEALED!
CLARK KENT is SUPERMAN
THE HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE is must reading

in his hands.

Back at his apartment, Kent is shocked to find bloody footprints in the hallway. He tracks them to a broom closet and finds Lana Lang, who is beaten and bloody. She's been tortured. She believes that they have the Kents as well.

Luthor sees Superman arriving at Lexcorp while Lex and Miss Amanda McCoy and lounging around in bathrobes, obviously basking in a post-coital glow (or at least Lex is). He tells her that she can call him "Lex" now, as if she would want to.

Actually Superman has arrived at the warehouse where Lana was tortured, and just as he confronts the two men who captured her the entire structure blows sky high. Superman is convinced that his parents were in there. He goes and confronts Luthor, who demonstrates his superiority over Superman with little things, such as a ring with a Kryptonite stone in it. Superman is helpless before him, even when Luthor grabs the Man of Steel and throws him out.

Superman takes Lana back to Smallville after getting her treated for her wounds and they ar-

rive at the Kent's home where he talks about how much they meant to him, and is shocked to find them there! They had never been taken prisoner, but then nothing in the story indicated that they had. This had just been what Lana had believed.

Besides the scrapbook, also taken from the Kents were Clark's old yearbooks and his birth certificate. Superman knows who took them, and he's concerned over what use they'll be put to.

Back at Lexcorp, all of this information is fed into the computers and cross-referenced to come up with the big news that Clark Kent is Superman. This is promptly refused by Luthor who doesn't believe that anyone with such power would ever disguise himself as an ordinary man because Luthor would never do that. Therefore he can't conceive of anyone else acting any differently. He says that the machine is a failure and he fires Amanda McCoy, adding the parting shot that, "I have no place in my organization for people who cannot see the obvious." This is one time that Lex Luthor has outsmarted himself.

On the other hand, after committing so much time and effort to such a project, wouldn't he go back and have the findings rechecked and the computer rechecked? Wouldn't what he know of Superman's altruistic motives indicate that the Man of Steel clearly thinks and sees things differently than Lex Luthor does? One would think so. But it beats some of the gyrations used in old stories for Superman protecting his secret identity, particularly when it happened to Clark time after time after time. After awhile, no explanation, no matter how clever, really would have sufficed.

SUPERMAN THREE
"Legends From The Darkside"

This is **LEGENDS** crossover chapter 17, which ties in to the six issue mini-series covered elsewhere in this volume but which isn't directly continued in that mini-series. The series can be read by itself without reading any other books and this particular Superman story is continued in **THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN** #426 (written by Marv Wolfman) and concluded in **ACTION COMICS** #586, all independent of specific events in **LEGENDS**. The purpose of this story is to go behind the scenes on Apokolips and show what is happening on that world while **LEGENDS** shows what is happening here.

Briefly, **LEGENDS** deals with Darkseid attempting to undermine humanity by turning them against their heroes. The way it's handled is not very convincing and is not a very well written series as it postulates that mankind would quickly forget all of the help that the superheroes have given them and try to have them banned, except for some token resistance. The series hit its nadir when a mod beat up twelve year old Robin, as though somebody is going to beat up a young boy just because he's wearing a costume. I'm willing to suspend quite a lot of disbelief in reading comics but each issue of **LEGENDS** was more absurd than the one before.

Getting back to issue three of **SUPERMAN**, it has a very striking cover of Darkseid holding up a defeated Superman by his cape. It's an excellent dramatic cover but no similar scene appears inside.

The story opens with Lois Lane on her way to see G. Gordon Godfrey, the rabble rouser who's behind getting super heroes banned. He's actually from Apokolips and has just adopted this guise on Earth. He explains his position to Lois Lane, that because of super heroes people have lost their self-reliance, as though ordinary people somehow have come to depend on costumed adventurers to get through the day. He freely admits that his goal is to have superheroes wiped from the face of the Earth.

Segue to Clark Kent who is racing down the street while something is chasing him. That something can make right angle turns and dodge around people, indicating that it has one target alone. He is trying to escape without changing to Superman because of a presidential order banning all superhero activity. Coming to an open manhole, Clark leaps into the sewer but looks back to see the twin energy pulses in hot pursuit. He manages to dodge them but they quickly double back and when he trips over a sewer worked, Clark Kent is nailed. By conveniently not being dressed as Superman when he is hit by the beams, he is transported to Apokolips and finds himself facing Darkseid, who is very surprised to see this mortal when he had expected to snag Su-

perman. The Phantom Stranger is present but he and Superman have already met (**ACTION** #585) and so he knows that the Phantom Stranger is well aware of who Clark Kent really is. Clark protests and demands to be sent home, whereupon Darkseid furiously grabs the reporter and hurls him outside to survive if he can in the wasteland which is the planet Apokolips.

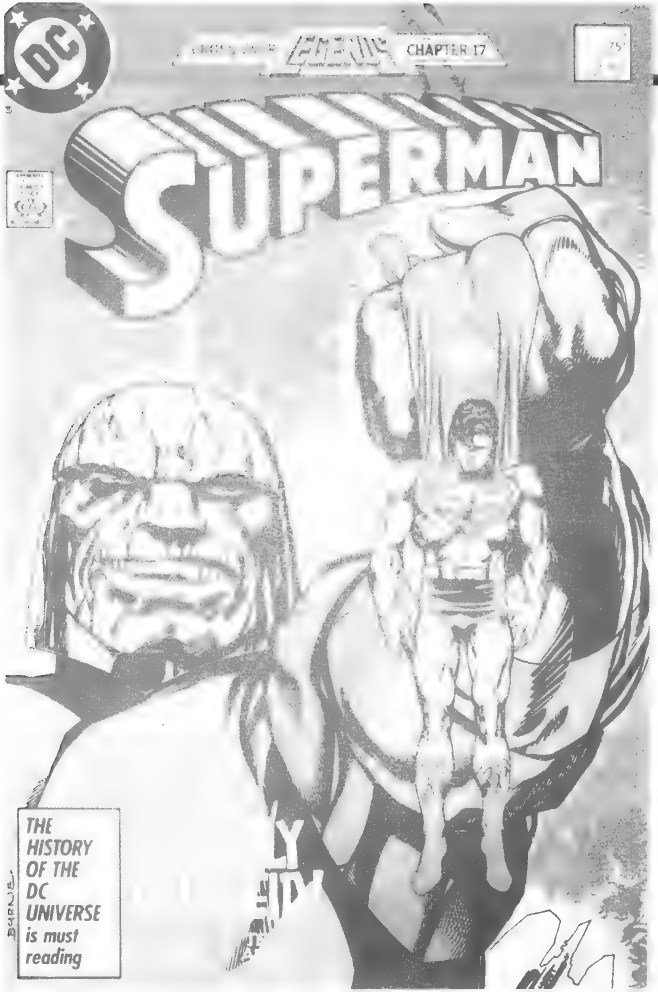
Kent is immediately set upon by scavengers who tear his clothes off until he shakes himself free, but by that time his Superman costume is exposed. Despite the filthy conditions around him the costume remains clean because of his special aura that protects the costume from harm and repels dirt. He flies around checking things out and we get a brief recap explaining who the New Gods and Darkseid are.

When Superman sees some of Darkseid's killer sentries, the para-demons, he ducks out of sight since he doesn't want it revealed that Superman really is present. Finding some rags he disguises himself as one of the Lowlies so that he can travel among them undetected. Apokolips is a hellish world, a world without heroes ruled by the all powerful Darkseid, and no one resists the minions of the dreaded one.

But into this inferno is born a hero, someone who does resist. He comes on a gathering of Lowlies who are witnessing the sentencing of one of their number for preaching against Darkseid. She is sentenced to be hurled into the fire pits. Superman tears down the fence separating the guards from the Lowlies and in the confusion the young woman escapes. But instead of attacking him themselves, the guards summon someone known only as The Pacifier. He appears to be a giant robot, one which possessed great strength and various weapons. Superman is knocked into a wall and buried beneath it but he responds in pure Superman fashion and then fights back by tearing the robot open to reveal that there is another creature inside, something called a Glommer. It gloms onto Superman and and manipulates his power of flight to hurl him into the fire pits. He survives, of course, and the final outcome of this encounter is covered in the **ACTION COMICS** section.

The Pacifier is the first of what will be several giant robot-type characters whom Superman will be fighting in the coming months. In fact he encounters so many of them so soon that they have become a bit of a cliche in the series as when he fights a giant mummy in **ACTION**, even that turns out to be a robot.

A story in which a superhero from Earth visits Apokolips is much more interesting than yet another scheme of Darkseid's unleashed on Earth. That Darkseid is "tasking" Earth doesn't make it any more interesting. Having Superman making his way through the underworld that is Apokolips is much more interesting because we just never


CHAPTER 17
SUPERMAN
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got to see a lot of it in **THE NEW GODS.** Things tended to happen very fast in that series and strolls through the landscape weren't included very much or very often.

SUPERMAN has marked a brief reunion between John Byrne and Terry Austin, once the primo art team on **THE UNCANNY X-MEN.** While they only worked together on the first three issues of the new **SUPERMAN**, it was nice to see them back together again, although Byrne's art style has altered somewhat since those days.

Taking a closer look at The Pacifier, this is clearly a Kirby-style creation, but then Byrne showed himself adept at handling such characters when he was at the helm of the Fantastic Four. Whether it be the FF at Marvel or tackling the realm of The New Gods, Byrne is well at home in the worlds that Jack Kirby made.

And what about Superman? If someone hadn't read the book in a couple years and picked up this issue, what would they think? They'd think that John Byrne is doing Superman, but all of the background changes Byrne made are not the least bit apparent here, indicating that the character hasn't really changed much at all. Superman is attacked and has an adventure. It's the most basic Superman plot there is. This issue shows most accurately how little effect Byrne's changes really have had on the character. Basically, it's just drawn better now is all. The rest of the changes are superficial. Can you tell by reading this story that Superboy never existed or that Krypton was a cold, loveless society? Not at all. Superman is Superman. This is just John Byrne's turn at the helm.

SUPERMAN FOUR
"Bloodsport"

Karl Kesel takes over as inker with this issue, having done an admirable job of inking Byrne's work on the **LEGENDS**. His inking style is different from Terry Austin's while still capturing the dynamic line of John Byrne.

Comic books have been as guilty of exploiting the legacy of the Vietnam war as any of the entertainment media have. Television started out by establishing the cliche of the psycho veteran who has flashbacks and generally causes trouble for all concerned. Even Clint Eastwood played a vet with flashbacks in his film ***FIREFOX.*** But while Hollywood has moved on into new cliches with Chuck Norris and Sylvester Stallone returning to The Nam to fight the war all over again and win this time, comic books still prefer the psycho. All John Byrne has done in this story is taken the Vietnam psycho vet and made him be the brother of the actual vet, a man who never went to Vietnam but who is living out his own guilt-ridden fantasies. Giving a new reason for the cliche to exist doesn't make it any less a cliche. If anything this version seems even more exploitive.

The story opens in a fast food restaurant on Dec. 23rd. Jimmy Olsen is having lunch with his girlfriend, Lucy Lane, sister of Lois. After recovering her sight, Lucy went to work for an airline which Olsen recent got some leads on. He believes that they're involved in something shady and he wants Lucy to try to get some information for him. She's resisting this because it was difficult for her to land the job and she doesn't want to jeopardize it. She even resents that Jimmy would put her in such a bind.

But before their argument can go much further, Jimmy hears a shout and turns to see a heavily armed man in the door and he grabs Lucy and hurls them both to the floor just as gunshots rake the room. A number of people are gunned down by a high tech machine gun. He then starts spewing nonsense about how the people are all wasting their lives and the freedoms that he and Mickey fought for in 'Nam. Then he rides away on a high tech motorcycle, shooting at people as he leaves. This is one seriously disturbed individual.

Jimmy Olsen uses his signal watch to summon Superman, although this holdover from the old series was never reintroduced into the new one before this. When did he give Jimmy the watch? And why Jimmy instead of someone else? It's clear that Jimmy misused it once and Superman questions the seriousness of the summons this time until he's directed to look inside the restaurant. From the look on his face, it's clear that the Man of Steel has never seen such carnage. There are definitely a lot of dead people in this place, and the scene is no doubt inspired by the McDonald's massacre in San Diego. The angle used by Byrne to show the bodies on page 4 is such that the human carnage is clearly communicated to us without showing us the actual horror that Superman sees from his point of view. He is shaken by what he sees and actually stutters when he talks to a police detective on the scene.

Using his infrared vision, Superman follows the motorcycle and finds the man who calls himself Bloodsport in a bowling alley with a hostage.

In an interesting scene, when Bloodsport holds a gun to a woman's head, instead of backing off, Superman moves so fast that between the pulling of the trigger and the hammer falling he's able to grab the gun and direct it away from the hostage. Superman knocks Bloodsport down but he then comes back with another gun which materializes in his hand and fires Kryptonite needles. But before Bloodsport has the chance to finish off the Man of Steel, Jimmy Olsen arrives and snatches up the other gun so that Bloodsport is forced to flee under the cover of a smoke bomb.

Superman is taken to a hospital where he's operated on to remove the Kryptonite needle. His invulnerability returns when the needle is removed.

We then learn what wasn't too difficult to guess. Bloodsport is a product of Lexcorp. Since Luthor is the only one who possesses Kryptonite, that part was obvious. But Bloodsport was not supposed to run amuck slaying civilians. Luthor wants him stopped--terminated,

Superman tracks down Bloodsport again and the psycho throws one weapon after another at him, keeping him off balance. But then a tank and armored men arrive, sent by Lexcorp to dispose of their out of control weapon. Bloodsport teleports in a super-bazooka which takes out the tank, but then Superman figures out what he's doing and uses his heat vision to ionize the air around him so that it would disrupt the teleporting. But then Bloodsport activates his last gambit, by activating the self-destruct on his power pack which will create a blast cover ten square miles.

Just then a new figure enters the scene--a quadruple amputee named Mickey. This is Bloodsport's brother, the one who passed himself off as Robert (Bloodsport) when he was drafted and fled to Canada out of fear. Mickey went in his place and suffered these severe injuries, and the guilt pushed Robert over the edge. Jimmy Olsen had gotten the FBI to take prints off one of Bloodsport's guns and then tracked down who he was and found his brother. So it was Olsen who actually solved this story and saved Metropolis.

Although Byrne dedicates the story at the end to "the names on the Black Wall--and those who remember them," it still comes off as exploitive.

Byrne is definitely already falling into a formula as this story is structurally very similar to issue one. The foe would have been easy for Superman to defeat except for the Kryptonite he possesses, and in the climax the fight ends because of the intervention of someone else, not because Superman is able to use his wits to defeat him. While he's clever enough to neutralize the teleportation mechanism, what would he have done about the power pack primed to go off when Bloodsport chose to have it explode? Jimmy Olsen saves the day.

SUPERMAN FIVE
"The Mummy Strikes!"

One could almost think that this is a Chris Claremont comic in that it opens with a dream that at first we don't know is a dream. In the final issue of **LEGENDS**, Superman and Wonder Woman fought side by side against giant robot dogs called Warhounds, but this wasn't really dealt with too specifically there, so we don't know whether Superman's dream is complete fabrication or just going beyond how far reality went. In the dream, after the duo destroy the Warhounds, Superman catches up to Wonder Woman and they take each other in their arms and are about to embrace and kiss when he wakes up. This was a very intense dream and one that tapped deeply into his innermost feelings. He had decided that there wasn't room in his life for romance, but subconsciously he feels otherwise. And the fact that Wonder Woman is in the same line of work as Superman certainly is to the favor of the match. But this dream sequence is apparently just a holdover from **LEGENDS** as the attraction between Superman and Wonder Woman, while an appealing idea, has not been touched on since either in the Superman titles or in the Wonder Woman title by George Perez, and with the current storyline in **WONDER WOMAN** dealing with matters far outside human society, it's not something we can expect to see touched on any time soon.

Clark is so rattled by the dream that he doesn't take time to shave, but a young woman who works at the Daily Planet, by the name of Catherine, doesn't mind as she's very attracted to Clark. But Clark is still carrying a torch for Lois even though she doesn't return to attraction, unless she knew he was Superman, but that's an old comic book cliche which Byrne has so far avoided--the hero feeling that his civilian identity is in competition with his alter ego for the affections of the girl he loves.

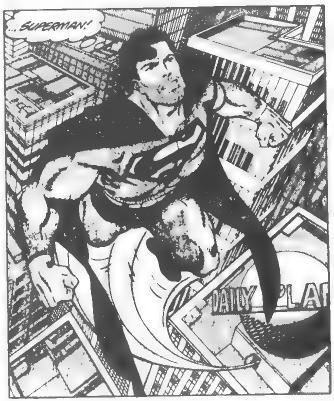
When Perry White plays a tape of a telecom message sent by Lois, Clark gets upset when the message breaks up and breaks off. Perry assures him that it's just interference and sends Kent to South America to find out what's going in. Kent agrees, but instead of the airport he goes as Superman.

He finds the camp with no trouble and arrives just in time to hear Lois complaining again about having lost the first exclusive Superman story to Kent. She's amazed to see Kent and at first suspicious that he's out to get a piece of her story, but he promises to let it be her exclusive. She still feels that he's a rival even after all this time.

Dr. Estevez, the scientist in charge of the project, shows Kent a machine tooled piece of metal found in a piece of pottery. All indications are that the metal is at least 6,000 years old. As they walk over to the actual excavation, they pass some huge statues of distinctly non-human looking heads, and they bear a distinct resemblance to something we meet later in the story.

Upon excavating the pyramid they found sublevels going deep into the ground which had clearly been dugs centuries before the civilization that built the pyramid. Deep beneath the ground they find a metal chamber which existed before any human civilizations ever did. This whole sequence is rich in atmosphere as the presence of an advance pre-human civilization always excites possibilities in the imagination. Kent is still holding the metal artifact and Dr. Estevez notices a hole the same size as the metal object. When placed in the hole, nothing happens at first until the wall suddenly crashes outward and a giant mummy emerges looking for all the world like something strait out of **TALES TO ASTONISH** #31 ("When The Mummy Walks") or **JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY** #61 ("Here Comes Gomdulla The Living Pharoah!"). Only this one fires laser beams from its eyes. Everyone manages to escape from the chamber but Clark sees to it that the entrance collapses while he's inside with the mummy.

Kent takes it on but it's a pretty tough customer. He holds back fighting full out in case it's some sort of life form. Finally he figures out that if



the metal artifact activated it, then all he needs do it pull the cylinder out of the control panel. Cut to an anxious Lois and the others outside trying to dig back into the chamber when a sudden explosion opens it back up for them. They find Kent unconscious and pull him out. Dr. Estevez's son goes back in to look around and comes face to face with the mummy, only now it has discarded the wrappings to reveal a giant robot.

Yes, it's another giant robot story, to be continued next issue. Still, Byrne has made the plot surrounding it quite intriguing as we have an expedition uncovering an ancient civilization which had advanced technology and tools even superior to what we have now.

The mummy looks a little silly in that it's so fat and we don't know why it's even wrapped like a mummy since that's something that's peculiar to the Egyptians, not South Americans. Even if the robot was discovered by a later people, why would they have wrapped it like a mummy? We have yet to learn.

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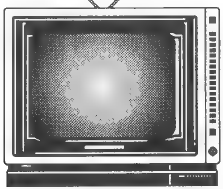

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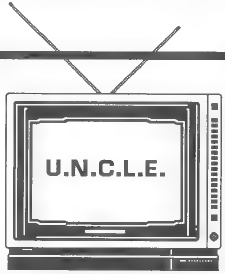

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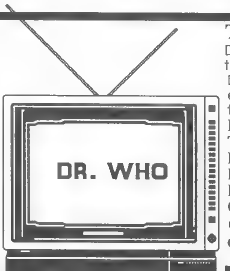

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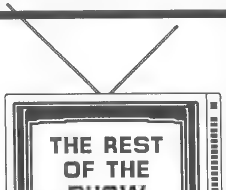

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